



August 19, 2002

Future of Fernald Workshop IV: Exploring Long-Term Public Access to Site Records

On March 13, 2002, more than sixty people met at the Crosby Township Senior Center to discuss long-term public access to information about the Fernald Environmental Management Project site in Fernald, Ohio. This *Future of Fernald* workshop was hosted by the Stewardship Committee of the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board, in cooperation with FRESH (Fernald Residents for Environmental Safety and Health) and Fernald Living History, Inc.

The purpose of the workshop was to seek answers to two important questions.

- What will the community want to know about the Fernald site when the environmental cleanup is complete?
- What are the best ways to provide this information for the community over the long term?

Why was this Workshop Needed?

For nearly 40 years until its closure in 1989, the Fernald site produced uranium metals for nuclear weapons, in the process releasing uranium contamination to the soil and water at the property. For the last decade, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), which operates the site, has been working to manage this contamination. Thousands of tons of contaminated materials have been shipped off the site, while materials with lower concentrations of contaminants have been placed in a specially designed on-site disposal facility. More than eighty percent of the site will be restored to native forests, prairies and wetlands. The site is scheduled for closure in 2006, meaning that the site will meet agreed upon cleanup levels for contaminants, with long-term groundwater treatment and monitoring in place.

Since 1999, area citizens have engaged in three *Future of Fernald* workshops to identify specific uses of the property after the site is closed. A stakeholder vision for the future of Fernald was developed in September 2000:

Fernald Stakeholders envision a Future for the Fernald property that creates a federally owned regional destination for educating this and future generations about the rich and

varied history of Fernald. We envision a community resource that serves the ongoing information needs of area residents, education needs of local academic institutions, and reinterment of Native American remains. We envision a safe, secure, and partially accessible site, integrated with the surrounding community that effectively protects human health and the environment from all residual contamination and full maintains all aspects of the ecological restoration.

Because it is focused on education, public access to information is an integral part of meeting this vision. Specifically, community members have recommended construction of a public education facility at the site. This past year, the Stewardship Committee received funding from DOE to explore what information the community will need and how this information could be accessed.

Who was Invited to the Workshop?

The workshop was open to everyone, and was publicized in a number of different ways: Both Invitations to the workshop and subsequent reminder cards were mailed directly to individuals who had attended previous workshops, as well as officials from local governments. Included with the invitation letters were questionnaires designed to introduce people to the issues that would be discussed at the workshop. (Results from these questionnaires were distributed at the workshop and helped to shape discussions.)

Brochures regarding the workshop were supplied to on-site groups, at public meetings for the site, to local environmental groups, and to each of the Stewardship Committee and Fernald Citizens Advisory Board members. Brochures were also placed directly in teacher mailboxes at nearby schools, and email announcements were sent to environmental educators. Posters were displayed at local grocery stores, schools, and libraries. Announcements and more detailed information were posted on the advisory board web site (www.fernaldcab.org).

In addition, two press releases—one from the Fernald site and one from the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board—were sent to local newspapers, television, and newspaper contacts.

What Information was Provided to the Workshop Participants?

Informational posters and artifacts were displayed prior to the meeting and throughout the evening. These displays included information regarding records management and the site's collection of records, photographs, and artifacts. There were also displays on the progress of remediation projects, site restoration, long-term stewardship and the proposed future public use of the site.

Each workshop participant received three handouts: a participant workbook outlining the issues to be discussed at the workshop, results from the questionnaire that was distributed with the workshop invitations, and a brochure containing the *Future of Fernald* vision and criteria for trails and a proposed education facility. This information was also summarized during a brief presentation at the beginning of the workshop.

What Happened at the Workshop?

The bulk of the workshop was devoted to two 45-minute breakout sessions. Discussion groups meeting during the first breakout session explored the kinds of information the community will need after the cleanup of the Fernald site is complete. Groups meeting during the second session focused on how information should be provided to the community. Each breakout group was facilitated and discussion points were recorded on flip charts. Facilitators summarized the discussions of each discussion group at the end of the evening. Participants were asked to choose one of four topic-specific discussion groups for each session. Background information and questions for each topic were provided in the participant workbook

Breakout Session 1: What Information Will the Community Need during Long-Term Stewardship?

There were two common threads throughout the workshop:

- 1) the public needs access to site records to ensure public confidence that human health and the environment have been adequately protected, and
- 2) there is a public need to preserve and communicate the cultural significance of the site, particularly its role in the Cold War and the grassroots movement to clean it up.

A. Records of Uranium Production and Environmental Cleanup

The participants in the breakout group were interested in the production process at Fernald, how it fit into the overall Weapons Complex, and how it led to environmental problems. This information could include histories of how the site was selected and each facility operating at the site (e.g., the silos). Equally important, however, were how production related to history and culture, including the site's role in the Cold War and how the secrecy of production impacted the people who worked there. Participants stated it is important to capture what life was like for the employees and their families and to celebrate their contribution to U.S. history.

The group believed the community should have access to information about the risk-based decision-making process and the CERCLA process. However, the group

seemed less concerned about the history of environmental contamination and cleanup than with what would remain at the site when cleanup is completed—what is left behind, what threats remain, and how the site will be monitored. Participants were also interested in the story of how the community was involved in the cleanup, citing the history of FRESH, the FCAB, and the lawsuits against DOE as important information.

B. Records Generated during Long-Term Stewardship

A primary concern for the participants in this discussion group was the on-site disposal facility (OSDF). The community wants information showing the exact perimeter of each cell, specific cell contents, and where those materials are located within the cell. The group also indicated that the community should be notified if the OSDF does not meet the assumptions on which its construction was based and how those discrepancies will be addressed. The community also needs regular reports on the status of the OSDF, not just monitoring data. Participants also stated that since acceptance of the OSDF by the community was based on limitations in current technology, the community should be informed of new cleanup technologies and opportunities that would further reduce risk at the site in the future. A participant stated that the same degree of information should be available regarding groundwater.

Overall, the members of this group wanted the community to be informed of any conditions at the site that are not consistent with the Records of Decisions (RODs) and indicated that the site steward should use established mailing lists to contact community members and regulators. Some members of the group wanted all levels of remaining contaminants above background levels and any health risks to be posted at the site. Members of the group also believed that the status of the restored areas should be available, because plants and animals can be an important indicator of the environmental health.

Regarding the management of the site during long-term stewardship, the community needs to know to whom questions regarding the site could be directed. This contact must be immediately available and be knowledgeable about the site. It is also important that the community understand which agencies have authority for the site and the kinds of information being provided to those agencies. The community also wants access to the budget for the site and information regarding the adequacy of that budget.

C. Cold War and Environmental Cleanup Artifacts and Photographs

Participants in this group made the point that not every artifact or photograph must be preserved, but that a good cross-section should be preserved and available. Artifacts and photos help preserve the "human story" of the site and better communicate the site's history. The participants believed these materials would be needed for the proposed education center, for educational research, and to help inform future stewardship decisions. Participants also stated that photos of the

people who worked at the site could be important to genealogical researchers. Group participants suggested using photographs and artifacts to develop historical maps of the site, a historical timeline, and a web-based virtual tour of the site. The group emphasized that aerial pictures of the site are needed to communicate how the site has changed over time.

This group also discussed the preservation of these materials. Participants suggested digitizing photographs and videos. The group also acknowledged that some documents (e.g., RODs, major reports) and blueprints and designs are best preserved on paper.

D. Cultural and Natural History Information

This group discussed the need for the community to have information about the Native American history of the site, including what Tribes lived at the site and what artifacts have been discovered there. Education about the reinterment of Native American remains at the site is also important. Information should convey the sacred nature of these burial sites and why they are significant to the Tribes. The participants stated it was important that this information be communicated from a Native American viewpoint.

Other important historical topics cited as important by the group participants were two house sites from the early 1880s, which Shakers occupied from 1815-1920. Also Fort Dunlap and Colerain Station, Morgan's Raid from the Civil War, the Cold War, and environmental remediation.

Regarding natural resources at the site, group participants stated that information was needed regarding endangered species, pre-settlement habitat, and natural restoration. Specifically, participants believed the community would need access to both the design plans and the goals for the restoration projects. Participants also stated that information should be available regarding the herbs and other plants used by Native Americans and early settlers.

Breakout Session 2: How Will the Public Access Fernald Records and Other Information?

In general, the workshop participants indicated that reasonable access to user-friendly, graphically represented information should be funded and provided at or near the site. However, there must also be a clearly communicated path to obtain more detailed information. Participants indicated a desire to continue community involvement in decisions regarding public access to site information.

A. What kind of access does the community desire?

This group stated that current needs may be different from future needs. Participants believed DOE should identify current records that should not be destroyed and locate records that have been transferred to locations off site.

According to the participants in this group, community members should be able to access information during times of the day that are convenient to them and should not have to pay to access information. Participants stated that it was important to have a variety of access points and redundant collections, in case one access point became unavailable or information was destroyed at one location. Some participants felt it was important to draw community members directly to the site, but overall the group acknowledged that distance might not be a significant issue due to the increasing prominence of the Internet.

Group members stated that a local information facility should be mostly interpretive and that in-depth information is not needed at the Fernald site because serious researchers would be willing to look elsewhere. However, the community should easily be able to identify and access more in-depth information. Participants stated that a backup location for local access to information should be determined, in case a multi-use education facility is not built at the site.

Participants stated that access to information would be difficult without a searchable, indexed database.

B. In what formats and media should the information be presented?

Participants in this group stated that no single format or media was appropriate to all audiences. General guidelines identified for communicating with the community included presenting information in layman terms and using pictures, maps, timelines and flowcharts. A virtual tour of the Fernald site was discussed. Participants suggested developing a large, Internet-based database that would allow community members to "go as far as they like" in learning about the site. The participants suggested some formats that would be appropriate to communicate certain types of information:

<u>Media</u>	<u>Type of Information</u>
Text/Hard Copy	Administrative Record
	Technical Reports
Pictures/Videos	Day-to-Day Life
	Living History
Internet	Technical Information
Flowcharts.....	Technical Processes
	Legal Processes
Models	History
	Virtual Tours
Artifacts.....	History
	Cultural Information
Maps	Stages of Cleanup

Participants briefly discussed how different formats and media can create obstacles to the community accessing information. Internet-based information can be

problematic when the community lacks computer skills or web sites are poorly designed. Participants acknowledged it might be difficult to find a technology all people can use successfully. They also stated that lengthy paper documents make it difficult to find relevant information and are difficult to store. Other problems included poorly identified and labeled information and poorly organized information. The group also discussed how current events (such as acts of terrorism) could lead to restrictions on certain kinds of information or access to web sites.

C. How should the public be informed about what information is available?

Currently, community members get information about Fernald from a number of sources including local newspapers, the Internet, regulators, and community organizations. Participants also cited public meetings and other events as opportunities to get information.

Participants in this group suggested several ways that awareness of the site could be maintained within the community. These included school programs and curricula, as well as field trips to the site and visits to the proposed education facility. Overall, the group felt that constructing an education center was a key to maintaining community awareness. Participants said that new residents to the area could be made aware of the site through public events, deed notification, realtors, and the chamber of commerce. Participants also suggested a Community Board of Directors for management of the site. Participants also believed that the Cold War Garden would help inform new residents about the history of the site.

Participants in this group stated that continuity was important in who provides information to the community and that decisions regarding community access to that information should have some oversight by the community. Organizations cited for managing information included libraries, community-based organizations, universities, and partnerships of these organizations. Members of the group believed universities were best equipped to handle all aspects of information regarding the site.

D. Who should be responsible for long-term public access to Fernald records and other information?

Group members had some difficulty determining who should manage long-term public access to Fernald, because they were not clear what that would entail. They believed that a community board should provide oversight, and that whoever managed information should have a true interest in the site. Specific organizations included the U.S. Department of Interior, regulating agencies, and educational institutions. Participants also suggested foundations, due to their fundraising expertise. Participants recognized that long-term funding was important and suggested federal, state, and private sources be identified.

Participants stated that a nonprofit organization or other organization that understands the mission of the site would be the most effective and reliable in providing information. Some participants were cautious about assigning this responsibility to local or state governments.

Likewise, participants felt that management of the proposed education facility should have community oversight, and should involve Native Americans and former employees. Some participants suggested nonprofit organizations, a university, or a consortium of universities to manage the facility.

What will Happen to the Ideas Shared at the Workshop?

The ideas shared during this workshop will be incorporated into a report, which will be presented to the DOE in September 2002. This report will help guide the agency as it prepares for site closure and subsequent stewardship of the site.

In addition, the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board continues to pursue the construction of a multi-use education center at the site. This workshop has helped the board to shape its understanding of what the community needs from such a center. In May, the Stewardship Committee will host a small design workshop to start developing a conceptual plan for an education center. This plan will incorporate many of the ideas presented during this *Future of Fernald* workshop, and will be used to generate support and funding for building a multi-use education center.

If you have any questions regarding this workshop or the *Future of Fernald* process, please contact the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board at 513.648.4141.